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AUTHOR Theofield, Mary B.
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ABSTRACT

The English/Social Studies Opportunity (ESSO) Program is a program designed for students with learning problems at Paint Branch High School in Burtonsville, Maryland. The program blends remedial reading and special education into a secondary school program which attempts to build reading and study skills, to effect positive self-concept, and to prepare students to cope with adult life situations. English and social studies are taught in a resource-room setting by the ESSO team, which consists of a reading teacher, two special education teachers, and an aide; however, only two team members are in each class of 25-30 students during a class period. Students are mainstreamed in other academic and special subjects classes; they receive positive support and instructional assistance by the ESSO team, whose resources are available to both students and subjects. Sample schedules for two specific students are discussed to amplify the description of the program. (MKM)

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Mary B. Theofield, Coordinator
Secondary Supplementary Education-
Career Project
Montgomery County Public Schools
14811 Notley Road
Silver Spring, Maryland 20904

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"ESSO--Self-Concept and Basic Reading in a Secondary School Program"

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What should a senior high school do to help the disabled reader? Few secondary schools, if the administration and staff are honest, can say that they are not confronted with answering that question. Yet, by the time a child reaches tenth grade, the complexities involved in analyzing and solving his or her reading problem are almost overwhelming. The introduction to a text on remedial methods notes that it is "... overly optimistic to think that all that is needed to transform remedial readers into good readers is an interesting new approach. Reading is a complex skill and there are no quick cures or instant remediation miracles." (1)

In recent years, as educators in reading have examined and reexamined programs to meet the needs of reading disabled students, there have also been increasing doubt and discontent among people concerned with programs prevalent in special education which segregate children, especially those mildly and moderately handicapped, by placing them in self-contained classes. Like his counterpart in reading, the special educator has asked himself questions: Do the benefits gained by placing a teenager in a small, segregated class outweigh the disadvantages? Is the individual attention received in a small group more desirable than the socialization benefits gained from contact with peers? Does a small, homogeneous group make members feel stigmatized? What effect does this feeling have on self-concept? Does a negative self-concept hinder academic achievement?

No one program can incorporate the best of all possible situations; any program must be a compromise of alternatives. But attempts must be made to design balanced, viable remedial programs.

Such an attempt is being made at Paint Branch High School in Burtonsville, Maryland. In an effort to assure the dignity of the high school student with special needs while also assuring some creative, comprehensive educational intervention, a secondary special education-reading model has been initiated. While admittedly not a panacea for solving the difficulties of all students with special learning problems, the English/Social Studies Opportunity (ESSO) Program blends remedial reading and special education into a secondary school program which, through content area curricula, attempts to (1) build reading and study skills, (2) effect positive self-concept, and (3) prepare students to cope with adult life situations.

Basically, English and social studies are taught in a resource room setting by the ESSO team, which consists of a reading teacher, two special education teachers, and an aide; however, only two team members are in each class of 25-30 students during a class period. Students are mainstreamed in other academic and special subjects classes with positive support and instructional assistance by the ESSO team, whose resources are available to both students and teachers.

Two Typical ESSO Students

Looking at two typical students is perhaps the best way to understand the program's philosophy, goals, and logistics. Let's look in first on Bruce, a tenth grader. He has been plagued by reading difficulties since he began school despite a variety of remedial efforts and enrollment as a special education student during the fourth and fifth grades. Bruce entered Paint Branch two years ago. At that time his parents feared he would be an early dropout. Bruce, however, has progressed much since he was initially recommended for ESSO. All students

not identified as special education have been recommended for ESSO by teachers after a screening process has located those students whose ability is significantly higher than achievement as determined by standardized test scores. In Bruce's case, the recommendation came from his junior high school English and geography teachers. Testing by the reading teacher at Paint Branch, using both formal and informal reading tests, was used to secure his place in the ESSO program and to gain valuable diagnostic information. Both parental and student approval were also obtained. His parents are now strong in support of ESSO and note with pride that Bruce likes school, his attendance has improved, and last semester he made the honor roll.

Bruce is enrolled in Electricity first period. His teacher, who also taught him in a general shop course last year, has seen much improvement in Bruce's work habits; for example, although he tends by nature to be rather sloppy, Burce is a perfectionist when doing a job, such as soldering, that requires care. His teacher also says that Bruce has gone from a grade of C to an A and is "super-motivated."

The E of ESSO

Second period Bruce joins 26 other students in his ESSO English class. As soon as he enters the room, he picks up his folder and reviews his contract. Earlier in the week Burce used the Flash-X, a hand-held tachistoscopic device, to arrive at a list of 20 vocabulary words. He then wrote sentences using these words. He also made an entry in his journal about a fishing trip with a friend, although he debated whether to use a teacher-suggested topic this week.

The teachers consider the journal an important aspect of ESSO and

making an entry is a standard weekly assignment. Bruce also corrected the errors in mechanics and spelling which he made in his previous entry and glanced over it in case he is asked by the teacher to read it aloud to her during his private conference at the completion of his contract. Thus, the journal serves as a vehicle for composition, as a basis for an adaptation of the language experience approach, and as a means of private communication between teacher and student.

Bruce has also finished an assignment using the tape recorder to receive instruction in filling out a job application. Today he debates whether to work on a teacher-made packet involving map reading or complete a Leisure Reading form. He elects to select an article in Hot Rod magazine for leisure reading. He quickly fills out the first part of the form with title and type of article. His purpose for reading is pleasure and he decides that his estimated speed should be as fast as he can read. He begins reading.

By this time, the other students have settled down to work on individual contract assignments. Kerry is gathering together her assignments because her contract is due today. She is a senior and has been enrolled in special education since elementary school. She has three older and three younger siblings, all of whom are doing well in regular programs. The ESSO team is striving to help Kerry become less dependent on her family and to make decisions on her own. When the special education teacher confers with Kerry, she will briefly quiz her on her assignments, check her papers, and negotiate a new contract. While this conference is being held, the reading teacher circulates around the room, offering on-the-spot help before collecting a small group, all of whose members need syllabication help.

Although aspects of the English class are typical of many reading labs, the team-teaching which allows individual and small group work, the personal contact through the journal and both formal and informal conferences, and the emphasis on the use of realia for the development of functional reading skills are all important in the improvement of both reading and self-concept. Research suggests that "...the commonest thread running through remedial education is the intensification of interest shown by the adult to the child." (2) This lab is far from an antiseptic systems approach; it utilizes contracting not only for individualizing instruction but for freeing staff to humanize instruction and provide that needed interest by adult to child.

In the Content Area Classes

Third period Bruce goes to Biology class. Today's activities, like four of the five days of class each week, involve laboratory work. The science program used, Ideas and Investigations in Science (Prentice-Hall, 1971), provides content with a maximum of laboratory work and a minimum of written work. The objectives of the IIS program mesh with those of ESSO; both want to make possible success for the student and to involve the student. Major scientific ideas are developed through a series of investigations; the problems the student encounters are relevant--pollution, population explosion, space exploration, etc.--and the language used is the student's own vernacular.

The SS of ESSO For Upper Classmen

Today's World is Kerry's third period class. This class is especially designed and taught by the special education teacher to give

an additional course in social studies to those students who want to discover more about themselves, their immediate world and the world outside. Intended primarily for eleventh and twelth graders, the text, Living in Urban America, (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974) provides the springboard to pursue topics such as providing for family needs through the exploration of jobs, housing, insurance and automobile purchase, etc.

Next period Kerry takes Food Service, a course whose aim is to help students develop salable skills in the food service area. Both serving and preparing techniques are emphasized by a hands-on approach--the management of the Panther's Paw, a mini-restaurant within the school. Already the class has been beneficial to Kerry; she works fifteen hours a week in the cafeteria of a local department store.

The Today's World and Food Service classes illustrate the incorporation of career education as an integral part of ESSO. Varied course offerings such as Food Service, Carpentry, and Radio/TV, allow ESSO students, as well as all Paint Branch students, to investigate and receive training as preparation for a career. Exploration of occupational opportunities, perception of self, and clarification of personal goals and values are pursued in the ESSO social studies classes because they are instrumental to career selection.

The day passes--Kerry's schedule includes taking a class in Guitar, serving as an aide in a Ceramic Sculpturing class, and taking a class in Ceramic Sculpturing herself.

Two other special ed. students are in the Guitar class along with 22 students from the general school program. Because the special education teachers go into the mainstream of the school to provide support

for special ed. students enrolled in content area classes, a special education teacher is in the Guitar class on a regular basis. In Guitar, as in the other classes visited, these teachers work not only with the identified special ed. students but circulate and offer help to any member of the class who needs assistance. In some classes (e.g., math) which are divided into skills groups, they are responsible for teaching several groups. Additionally, they confer with teachers, suggest instructional strategies and generally fulfill their function as resource persons.

Kerry's artistic talent was discovered last year, a talent which probably owes it actualization to her being allowed to explore specialized subjects open to students within the mainstream of the school. She get much satisfaction from both expressing her creativity through sculpturing and serving as a peer tutor in this class.

The SS of ESSO for Sophomores

Bruce, meanwhile, has finished classes in driver education, typing, and algebra. He is now in his seventh period class, U.S. History and Government II. The special education teacher and the aide who team to teach this ESSO class also use diagnostic information to prescribe weekly assignments for each student. Students do not negotiate a contract with the teacher as they do in English, but they select assignments from a teacher-prepared list. Minimum work is required each week for a C but extra work accomplished can raise a grade.

Bruce is meeting with a small group today to discuss a set of photographs that are part of the support kit accompanying the basic textbook, The Americans (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970; rev. 1975). This

history book couples high interest/low readability materials with an inquiry approach to U.S. history. Both this textbook and the supplemental materials used basically parallel the content of the regular U.S. history curriculum. Thus, students who leave ESSO can easily enter a regular history classroom. (Since each student's progress is evaluated by the ESSO team in coordination with subject area teachers every three weeks, there is fluidity into and out of the program.)

Conclusion

Is ESSO succeeding? The teachers see the students improving in self-concept as well as basic academic skills. Much of the impact, they believe, is made possible because of utilization of staff to maximum efficiency. Seldom does a reading teacher lend his expertise to a special education program, and, conversely, seldom does a special education teacher extend his talents to as many as the 90-100 students enrolled in ESSO.

ESSO offers more than a promise.

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